

A RECOVERY READER

A GUIDE FOR SPONSORS, STUDENTS & TEACHERS



SELECTED WRITINGS FROM
60 YEARS
OF 12-STEP RELATED
ARTICLES, ESSAYS, &
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

ANONYMOUSREVIEW.ORG

A Recovery Reader

**Studies in AA, the Steps and
the Process of the Program**

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EDITORS

Joe A. and Rich T.

CONTRIBUTORS

Barefoot Bob H., Beth J., Fred S., Jack McC.

Joe A., John H., Kate O., Kerry K.,
Steve L., Ted D. and those who asked
to be left truly anonymous.

NONALCOHOLIC AUTHORS

Dr. Harry M. Tiebout
Emmet Fox
Rocco A. Errico
Victor Parachin

WEBSITE AUTHORS FROM:

sober.org
barefootworld.net
sponsormagazine.org
anonymousreview.org
primarypurposegroup.org

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*Portions of this book have been reprinted in Sponsor Magazine.
sponsormagazine.org*

WARNING: Travel beyond this point without a Sponsor is not advised.

Intent of This Book

This book is intended to be used:

- a) to serve as a personal enrichment course-in-a-book on Recovery and AA History.
- b) for a Sponsor who shares this information with someone they are attempting to help.
- c) to create a new class as appropriate to your area's needs and opportunity by taking the suggestions and materials to assemble or revise as you see fit.

It is not presented as the “only” way to do the work of sharing the Program, but is synthesis of work by over thirty authors over the past half century plus of effective AA recovery.

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Where to Start

Everyone has to start where they are. Our charge is to “carry this message.”

Too often, the person carrying the message does not realize they are carrying their own prejudices... “If they don’t have a sponsor, they aren’t serious...”, “If the God Talk runs them out, alcohol and drugs will run them back in...” or “Don’t you KNOW ...”

The newcomer is a blank slate. Far fewer people hear about Alcoholics Anonymous than we would like to think.

This book approaches the idea of “carrying the message” from the viewpoint of the Newcomer. The new Newcomer. The one who has never heard the message - or has never paid attention to it.

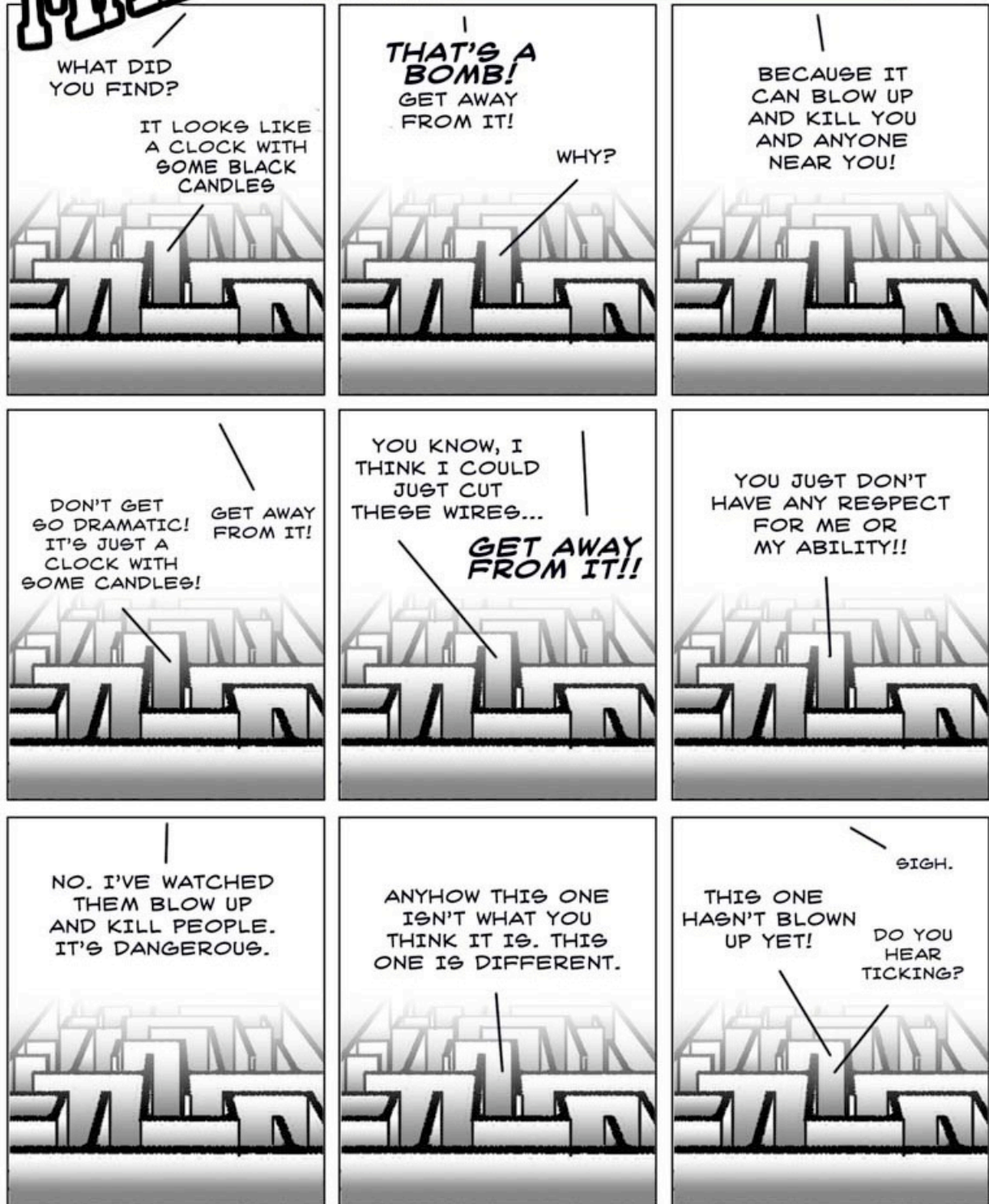
We lay a simple set of spiritual tools at their feet. This book is designed to provide teaching skills that will help you carry this message. To lay it at their feet. To quiet their fears so they can take the Steps to find their future and freedom from their past.

Carry this message.

MAZING RECOVERY

THE BOMB

BY JOE A.



What Is Expected

You found your way to Alcoholics Anonymous.

Congratulations

You may be here for the first time, or you may be returning. Either way, you never have to pick up a drink again.

What Is Expected

Go to meetings. Meetings are where you will make contact with the fellowship, find out what we mean by Big Book and other references, get phone numbers, and discover how you fit into the AA fellowship.

Don't Drink Between Meetings

Do NOT pick up a drink between meetings. If you do not take a drink, you cannot get drunk. If you think you might drink put it off for 15 minutes, then another 15 minutes, and so on until you can get to a meeting. Use the phone to call someone before you take a drink - after you take a drink there is nothing they can do to help.

Get a Big Book

The Big Book is the book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Copies are available for sale in almost every meeting. You can get copies in used bookstores, or even the public library. We recommend you become familiar with the first 181 pages (164 basic pages plus Dr. Bob's story at the beginning of personal stories).

Go to Several Big Book Study Meetings

Big Book Studies will read a portion of the book as a group and discuss its meaning. The Program is found in the Big Book and these study meetings will help you far more than reading the book by yourself.

Get a Home Group

When you have been to some meetings, it is suggested that you find a Home Group. That is a group you attend regularly and get to know people (and be known).

Get phone numbers. Some people will offer you their phone numbers - use them. There is nothing magic about having a list of numbers in your pocket. Calling someone to ask what meetings they would recommend, when they said something that specifically addresses a problem you are having, or before you take a drink. Use phone numbers.

Get a Sponsor

A sponsor is someone who is ahead of you in the Program who can get to know your story, share their story, and show you how to work the Steps.

Do Service

The meetings exist because people volunteer to set up the tables, make coffee, set out the literature, greet people at the door, or clean up after the meeting. This kind of service can help

you feel a part of the meeting and gives you the opportunity to talk with people casually.

There is an unofficial suggestion of 90 meetings in 90 days. Part of the reason is the commitment gives you a real chance to understand what we

offer, the different types of meetings, and enough time detoxifying your body to be able to have a clear enough mind to answer the question: "Am I an Alcoholic?"

Tools of the Program

We of AA have many tools to help us.

Fellowship

The company of others who share our path to Recovery. The Fellowship is expressed in MEETINGS; through LITERATURE; through SPONSORSHIP; using the PHONE between meetings; through the STEPS; and through the sharing of experience, strength, and hope outside the meetings.

Meetings

Regular meetings of AA are held by Groups. The Group may host one meeting per week or many. Guides are available with a list of local days, times, and locations of meetings in the local area. Attend several different meetings and several different types (Open, Discussion, Speaker, Book Study, etc.) to find the one you want to make your Home Group, and then attend the meeting(s) for that Group regularly.

Groups

This is one group of recovering alcoholics who gather one or more times each week to share their experience, strength, and hope. Joining a Home Group helps end our alcoholic isolation and helps build the foundation for the work ahead.

The Phone

We use the telephone as our “meeting between meetings.” Regular contact with other people is a lifeline when new situations require us to deal differently with life on life’s terms. We call our Sponsors and call other people we have met in the meetings. We encourage you to collect and use phone numbers.

Service

We do Service to share our experience, strength, and hope; to make our meetings possible; to see how our experience can benefit others; and to give back to the Fellowship for what was given to us so freely. We become trusted servants - we do not govern.

Literature

The Big Book is the book ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS. The “12 & 12” is the book THE TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS.

These two books give the specific steps of our Program, which we have found necessary to find and maintain our sobriety. They are available at our cost and the pamphlets are free.

Sponsor

A Sponsor is a person with substantial sobriety who is willing to share their experience, strength, and hope with you - to help you apply the 12 Steps

to your life. Sponsors are not therapists, counselors, bankers, or authorities.

We are all alcoholics working Recovery One Day at a Time. Find someone who has Recovery as you want it and ask them what they did to get it.

A Temporary Sponsor

is someone willing to answer your first questions, even though they may only be a little way ahead of you on the path of Recovery. A Temporary Sponsor will help you for the first month or two while you look for your Sponsor.

Steps

The Twelve Steps are the process to deal with life without the crutch of alcohol and drugs. The Steps are written in an order and must be worked in that order to get the effect. We work the Steps with a Sponsor and with the support of other members of the program who are ahead of us in the process - and we help those who come after us with what we have actually done.

The authority of AA comes from Page 20 of the Big Book - "We will tell you what we have done." Not theory or ideas or opinions we have heard, but actually done.

AA, Steps and Program

What They Are and What They Are Not

AA (the affectionate nickname for the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous) is something different. If you think you know what it is, it will disappoint you and you will go away looking for what you expected to find. You will miss what it is and, if you are an alcoholic of our type and moving along that doomed path, what it is may save your life.

People come to AA and try to tell themselves they already know what it is. When AA turns out to be something other than what they expected before they arrived, they miss the message and the hope, and go away disappointed.

They think AA is a church. It isn't. AA is a lousy church. We say that you have to have a power greater than yourself, which most of us call God, but we do not tell you what to believe. If you want church, go to church. That's where they do "church" right.

They think AA is therapy. AA is lousy therapy. If you want therapy, go to therapy. That's where they do therapy. Many of us have used therapy as part of their program, but AA is not therapy.

They think AA is social services. Some AAs have been known to share cigarettes, rides, or allow a newcomer to sleep on the couch, but AA is lousy social services. Go to social services for that - they do it better.

The Preamble

"Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."

The Big Book

The Big Book is the book "Alcoholics Anonymous," first published in 1939, written primarily by Bill Wilson and edited through discussion between the two AA groups (approximately 100 alcoholics) with additional input from family and various professionals. The purpose of the book was to carry the system of 12-Steps for Recovery for the hopeless condition of alcoholism. It marked the first time a system was in place that could be worked if the instructions were followed. "Do the Work and you get the Result."

The Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps are a set of principles, spiritual in nature ... Although based on the work outlined by the Oxford Group, a previous fellowship, the Steps were actually written down for the first time in 1938 during the writing of the Big Book.

The Program

The Program is the system of recovery. Like all programs it is “a set of instructions to be followed in order.” This means that jumping out of sequence does not work the Program. The Program is referred to a couple of times in the Big Book as “a design for living” that really works. It is based on the Twelve Steps, to be used as Tools in our daily life

The Fellowship

The Fellowship is the collection of individuals, groups, and service structure that allow the regular meetings to exist and allows newcomers to find those meetings. The Fellowship is where we find the experience, strength, and hope of our members, whether in a discussion meeting, from the podium at a speakers meeting, or across two cups of coffee in a late-night diner.

The Literature

The Literature refers to those pieces of “conference approved” books, pamphlets, and multi-media presentations that have gone through the process of review and revision by the fellowship through the World Service Organization. The purpose of “conference approved” literature is to ensure that the content is a result of our shared experience in Recovery – not just an opinion from one person.

Conference approved literature includes:

- ***Alcoholics Anonymous*** – *The Big Book*
- ***Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*** – *The 12 & 12*
- ***Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers*** – AA History, the Akron viewpoint from Dr. Bob
- ***Pass It On*** – AA History, the New York viewpoint from Bill W.
- ***AA Comes of Age*** – AA organizational history starting with the 1955 World Service Conference.
- ***Living Sober*** – Daily Guide for living the AA way.
- ***Came to Believe*** – Exploration of 2nd and 3rd Step topics.
- ***Language of the Heart*** – Bill Wilson's articles from the Grapevine
- ***Experience, Strength & Hope*** – a collection of all of the individual stories of recovery from all four editions of the Big Book
- ***Daily Reflections*** – A book of reflections by AA members for AA members
- And other books from WSO, plus several dozen pamphlets addressing individual topics of interest to those in Recovery.

The Twelve Traditions

The Twelve Traditions are a series of suggested guidelines to ensure the survival of AA and the independence of the individual and groups that compose AA. They are based on our first few decades of trial and error and do not hold the power of law over members or groups. They serve as guides based on our previous experience, strength, and hope as a Fellowship.

Understanding Anonymity

So many in Alcoholics Anonymous, both old-timers and newcomers alike, do not have an understanding of the 11th and 12th Traditions relating to Anonymity; the relationship of Anonymity to the Spiritual Ideals contained in the 12 Steps of AA; and the principles and ideals of Trust, Honesty, Hope, Faith, Courage, Integrity, Willingness, Humility, Brotherly Love, Justice, Perseverance, Spirituality, and Service to One Another.

To the extent that my sponsors explained it to me, and from what I have read from the history of AA, I will try to put this vital issue into some kind of proper perspective.

These selections from AA literature clarify the 11th Tradition and its intent.

In some sections of AA, anonymity is carried to the point of real absurdity. Members are on such a poor basis of communication that they don't even know each other's last names or where each lives.

- *As Bill Sees it, page 241*

Dr. Bob said there were two ways to break the Anonymity Tradition:

- (1) – by giving your name at the public level of press or radio;
- (2) – by being so anonymous that you can't be reached by other drunks.

- *Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, page 264*

The 11th Tradition states, in the short form, "Eleven – Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press,

radio and films." (And we might also add TV at this level for further restriction)

The 12th Tradition states, in the short form, "Twelve – Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." (Even before my own personality)

Dr. Bob stated that within the group, every member should know the first name, last name, address and phone number of all the members in the group. If these are not known, then we as a group are operating above the level of anonymity intended – We are not able to be of Service to One Another in Time of Need.

Did you ever try to look up someone in the phone book (like your sponsor, or someone you're related to, when your head was putting it on you??) without knowing their last name? Or go into a hospital or jail to try to visit or carry a meeting into a sick or incarcerated member, and stand there with your mouth hanging open, when asked, "What is their name?"

No Name, No Visit, No Meeting.

"Sorry about that but we have our policies and procedures, sorry we can't help you."

Let us see what the long form of the 11th and 12th Traditions can give us in understanding Anonymity and the Principles we ought to live by.

11. – Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A. A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as AA members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed. Our public relations should be

guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

12. – *And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.*

Ahh yes. We are to be anonymous relative to the "General Public", as members of Alcoholics Anonymous. We ought not be publicly identified as members of Alcoholics Anonymous in the press, on the radio, or in films, videos, and TV, media which is disseminated to the General Public. It is a Humility thing; we have no need to say "How great we are!". We think that in this respect the Humility of AA will attract more suffering alcoholics to the program than any amount of advertising or promotion. It is a matter of Trust.

Dr. Bob's comment –

"Since our Tradition on anonymity designates the exact level where the line should be held, it must be obvious to everyone who can read and understand the English language that to maintain anonymity at any other level is definitely a violation of this Tradition. The AA who hides his identity from his fellow AA by using only a given name violates the Tradition just as much as the AA who permits his name to appear in the press in connection with matters pertaining to AA.

"The former is maintaining his anonymity ABOVE the level of press, radio, and films, and the latter is maintaining his anonymity BELOW the level of press, radio, and films - whereas the Tradition states that we should maintain our

anonymity AT the level of press, radio, and films."

Our egos are trying to get attention. We can lose our humility and we are spoiling the great blessing we have been given. The truth is that any one of us may fail to stay sober as a result of our ego and failure to practice the steps in all our affairs. We should be ever mindful that no action we take as individual members should affect AA as a whole of AA. Our very lives depend upon the survival of AA and our Unity. Without AA, all we have left is drunkenness and the slide into oblivion.

The principle of Trust is first and foremost, the foundation of all spiritual principles and ideals, that we should never break another member's anonymity to anyone outside the AA group. To do so would break Trust, and without Trust, all the other principles are Impossible.

Has any alcoholic ever been able to be Honest, or practice any of the other principles and ideals, with something or someone he didn't trust?

Of course not...

We may break our own anonymity in the process of trying to help another, but we must never break the anonymity of another.

When TRUST is broached, resentments raise their ugly heads, and all the other principles are out the window, and often times Sobriety. That is why it is so important that no member should ever broach another member's confidence... and especially any broach of confidence between a sponsor and sponsee. This applies as well to any and all gossiping between members about what another member did or said.

I well remember what my sponsors burnt into my mind,

"That I should never take any action that would endanger another member's sobriety, because in so doing I endanger my own..."

And that included hitting on members of the opposite sex, especially newcomers.

Probably more members lose their sobriety for this single reason, than all others combined, as a result of the resentments and gossip that rear their ugly heads.

Newcomers are so very vulnerable, so naive, so confused, so fearful, and looking for anything that

will fill that god-awful hole in the gut, for any little bit of acceptance, that any broaching of TRUST can send them into a resentment that could mean their Sobriety and their Life. Their Anonymity, Sobriety, Well-Being and Trust must be protected.

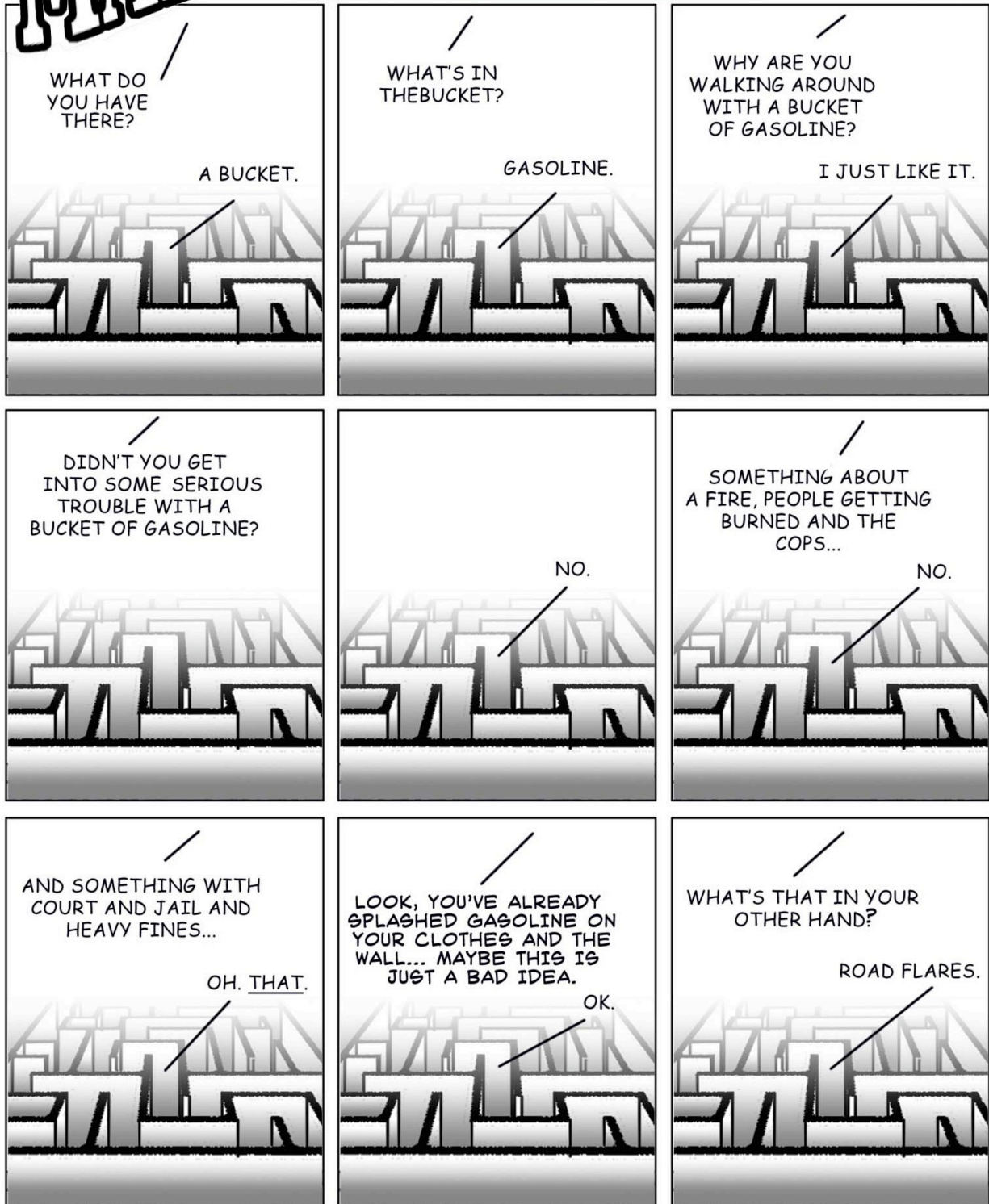
They are the Life Blood of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We protect these things by keeping our own yaps shut – To Protect Our Own Sobriety.

MAZEING RECOVERY

THE BUCKET

BY JOE A.



The Insanity of Alcoholism

The Insanity of Alcoholism is NOT the goofy behavior that people exhibit when they are drunk. Everyone who ingests enough alcohol will act goofy.

The Insanity of Alcoholism is the alcoholic's persistent return to alcohol in the face of overwhelming evidence that it is destroying his or her life, over and over again.

There are some in our fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous who have serious mental problems, but most of us joke about how "insane" or "crazy" or "goofy" we are or have been, when what we really are talking about is our emotional immaturity, our impulsiveness, our lack of self-discipline – our character defects if you will. Most of us would have a hard time describing many of our thoughts and actions as being insane. In fact, in some areas of life, we may exhibit a high degree of sanity.

However, there is something about the way we perceive the world around us that has always caused us a great deal of discomfort in simply living our lives.

Our general discomfort with living has much to do with the way we perceive the effects of alcohol. Our falling short of what is called "well-adjusted" is definitely a part of our makeup as an alcoholic. However, that alone does not separate us much from the general population. It is our physical as well as our mental response to alcohol that is INSANE, and that is what separates the alcoholic from the non-alcoholic.

There are two problems alcoholics have with alcohol:

- (1) the obsession of the mind, and
- (2) the compulsion of the body, an incomprehensible craving.

Somewhere along the line, early or late, we develop an obsession with the idea that alcohol eases our minds and solves our problems. Then, our physical response to alcohol manifests in what the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous calls an allergy. Our alcoholic bodies process the alcohol in a manner which causes us to crave more. The alcoholic insanity of our minds tells us that it is a good idea to drink to relieve our stresses and to have fun. Once we start, our alcoholic bodies tell us we must drink more to satisfy the craving.

As every alcoholic should know, that is where the well-known cycle begins, and continues over and over again, leading to death, incarceration, or "wet brain" insanity. What Dr. Silkworth called the "phenomenon of craving," manifesting as an "allergy," is so overpowering that all else comes in second to our primary concern of getting the next drink, even life itself takes second place.

That, my friends, is the "INSANITY OF ALCOHOLISM."

It is only relieved and arrested by total abstinence, and as we have found, by the thorough application of the 12 Steps of AA in our lives and in all of our affairs to achieve a psychic change, a "spiritual awakening," leading to growth and maturity, and a firm grasp of the reality of life and the world about us.

As a young man (with tears in his eyes) in his first AA meeting said:

... "I'm here because I just want to live ...

that's it ... I just want to live" ...

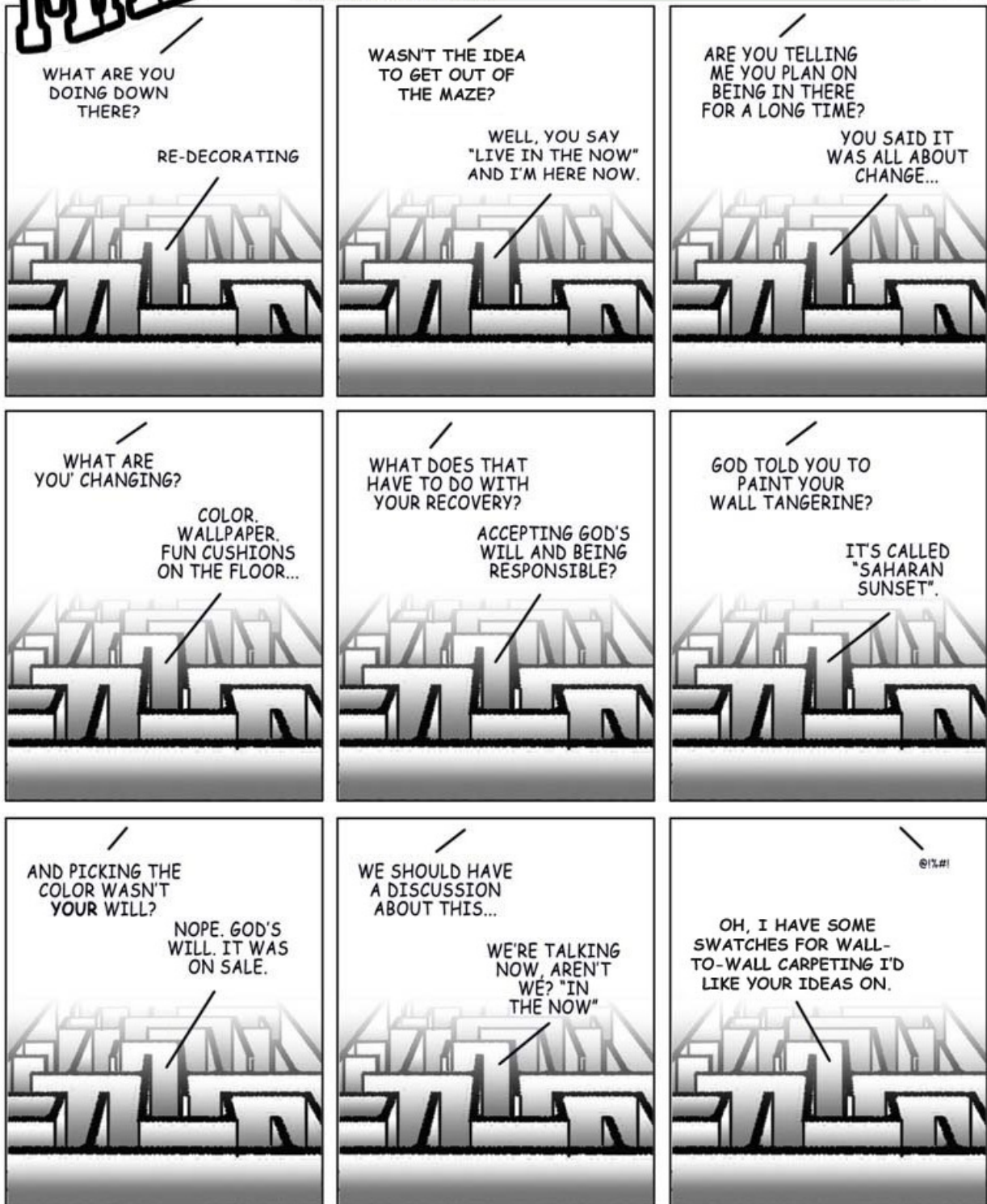
It is as Simple as that!!!

*Love and Peace,
Barefoot Bob H.*

MAZEING RECOVERY

SETTLING IN

BY JOE A.



What Does “Going to Any Lengths” Mean?

I have been asked this question again and again. I've also brought this subject up to just about every person I have ever worked with through the Steps. What follows is generally my response, taken from two sources. The only thing that I would want to add to this is living the Oxford Group's Four Absolutes of Honesty, Unselfishness, Purity, and Love (which can be found in their reverse negative form in the Big Book at Step 4, Step 10, and Step 11).

– – Barefoot Bill

Taken from the ten points of the “How It Works” reading. Chapter five of the book Alcoholics Anonymous has always been a faithful guide for people who want to practice the Twelve Step Program. The following Ten Points are a summary of the lifesaving directions given in Chapter Five, and are to be considered as part of your daily Program:

- Completely give yourself to this simple Program.
- Practice rigorous honesty.
- Be willing to go to any lengths to recover.
- Be *fearless and thorough* in your practice of the principles.
- Realize that there is *no easier, softer way*.
- Let go of your old ideas absolutely.
- Recognize that half measures will not work.

- Ask God's protection and care with complete abandon.
- Be willing to grow along spiritual lines.
- Accept the following pertinent ideas as proved by AA experience:
 - a) that you cannot manage your own life;
 - b) that probably no human power can restore you to sanity;
 - c) that God can and will if sought.

Taken from parts of Chapter One “Bill's Story” in the Big Book:

PAGE 8 (STEP 1)

No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master.

PAGE 12 (STEP 2)

My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?"

That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.

It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that

growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would!

Thus was I convinced that God is concerned with us humans when we want Him enough? At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view.

PAGE S 13-16 (STEPS 3 THROUGH 12)

There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then I understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since.

My schoolmate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies. We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability.

I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense. I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me. Never was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure.

My friend promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain

the new order of things, were the essential requirements.

Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid. It meant destruction of self-centeredness. I must turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all.

While I lay in the hospital the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.

My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that.

My wife and I abandoned ourselves with enthusiasm to the idea of helping other alcoholics to a solution of their problems. It was fortunate, for my old business associates remained skeptical for a year and a half, during which I found little work. I was not too well at the time, and was plagued by waves of self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found that when all other measure failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day. Many times I have gone to my old hospital in despair. On talking to a man there, I would be amazingly lifted up and set on my feet. It is a design for living that works in rough going.

We commenced to make many fast friends and a fellowship has grown up among us of which it is a wonderful thing to feel a part. The joy of living we really have, even under pressure and difficulty. I have seen hundreds of families set their feet in the path that really goes somewhere;

have seen the most impossible domestic situations righted; feuds and bitterness of all sorts wiped out. I have seen men come out of asylums and resume a vital place in the lives of their families and communities. Business and professional men have regained their standing. There is scarcely any form of trouble and misery which has not been overcome among us. In one western city and its environs there are one thousand of us and our families. We meet frequently so that newcomers may find the fellowship they seek. At these informal gatherings one may often see from 50 to 200 persons. We are growing in numbers and power.

There is, however, a vast amount of fun about it all. I suppose some would be shocked at our seeming worldliness and levity. But just underneath there is deadly earnestness. Faith has to work twenty-four hours a day in and through us, or we perish.

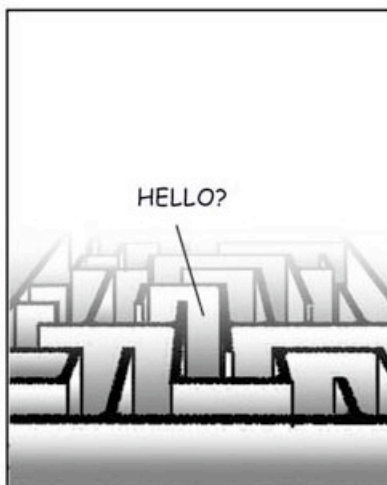
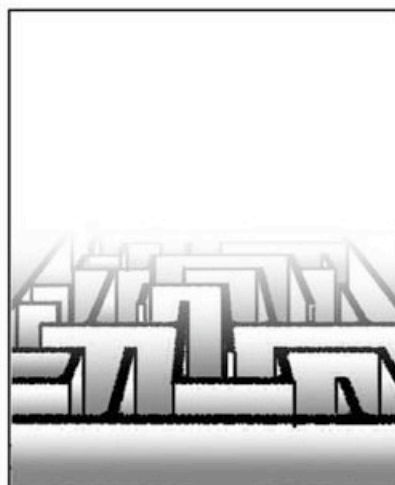
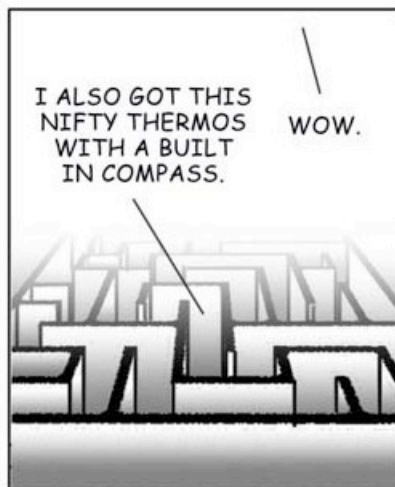
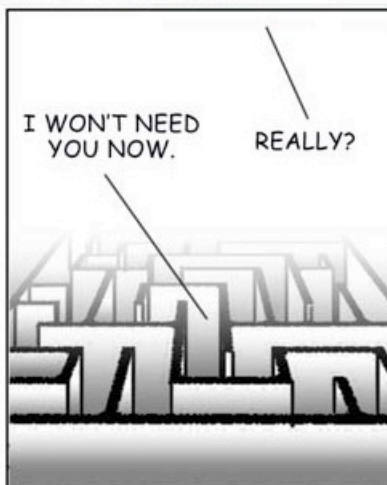
Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia. We have it with us right here and now. Each day my friend's simple talk in our kitchen multiplies itself in a widening circle of peace on earth and good will to men.

– Bill Wilson, 1954

MAZING RECOVERY

A NEW ANSWER

BY JOE A.





A RECOVERY READER

A GUIDE FOR SPONSORS, STUDENTS & TEACHERS

**A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS ON 12-STEP RECOVERY
FROM THE 1940S TO THE 21ST CENTURY, INCLUDING:**

- THE FIRST BOOKLET ON AA SPONSORSHIP BY CLARENCE SNYDER (1944)
- ONE WAY GROUP INVENTORY GUIDE (1959)
- ESSAYS ON SPIRITUALITY, INVENTORY, AND LIVING IN RECOVERY
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